



# INTRODUCTION

Knowing how to properly pronounce Sanskrit is a crucial skill for serious students and teachers of yoga.

This sacred language originated from oral traditions developed to communicate the spiritual insights of ancient sages. Because Sanskrit is the language of yoga, understanding key Sanskrit terminology and its pronunciation can deepen a practitioner's knowledge of the yogic path. It can also provide a more complete understanding of the meaning and purpose of yoga *āsanas*, or postures—an understanding that is lost when these *āsanas* are known only by their English names.

Sanskrit is said to have been divinely revealed to meditating sages thousands of years ago. One story tells of Śiva beating his *damaru* drum fourteen times and creating the Sanskrit alphabet. These fourteen “Maheśvara Sūtras” form the beginning of the text defining Sanskrit grammar. The alphabet is perfectly designed for the human vocal apparatus, and the sound of each word represents the subtle energy of its meaning. Because each syllable is either one or two beats, pronouncing correctly allows one to feel the natural rhythm of the language and imbibe the true essence of the word. Sanskrit is called *Devavāṇi* or “language of the Gods” because it is said that the Gods understand and communicate in Sanskrit. Thus, sacred ceremonies like births, weddings, deaths, and religious rituals all involve Sanskrit chanting. The sound of the Vedic hymns is their life, preserved by thousands of generations through chanting.

Because Vedic wisdom was passed down orally long before it was written, no one knows when it actually began. The Vedas are the earliest known Sanskrit writings, beginning with the Rg Veda whose written form dates back to at least 1500 BCE. The subsequent three Vedas (Sāma, Yajur,

and Atharva) are all derived from the *Rg Veda*. The *Upaniṣads*, which form the basis for Vedānta philosophy, are extrapolations and summaries of the Vedas. Taken together, the Vedas and their offspring *Upaniṣads* are known as *sruti*, meaning “heard,” because they are considered to be of divine origin, originally revealed by enlightened seers.

Yoga, along with *Ayurveda* (Indian medicine), *Jyotiṣa* (Indian astrology), and countless other branches of Vedic wisdom, was passed down orally and literally using the refined Sanskrit language. *Sūtras*, terse aphorisms packed with information and easy to memorize, were often composed to record ideas in the most efficient way possible. Only with the help of a teacher and/or a commentary could a student learn the depth of their meaning. Verses were also written in rhythmic meters, most commonly four lines of either eight or eleven syllables each. Chanting or singing these verses provides another natural and easy way to remember them by heart.

Yoga in the West is often largely focused on practicing physical postures (*āsanas*). However, *āsana* is in fact only one of eight distinct limbs of yoga (see *Aṣṭāṅga*). Knowing the posture names in Sanskrit allows teachers and students to unambiguously refer to a posture. Using the English translation as the reference may be confusing because translations can differ—the same posture may have several different English names. In addition, fully comprehending all parts of an *āsana* name can provide a deeper understanding of its form and function. Noticing how the same word is used in several different posture names will reveal subtle nuances that would otherwise be lost. The Indian process of learning is largely based on viewing an object from a variety of angles, thus seeing it in its complete form.

The purpose of this book is to preserve and encourage the correct sound and spelling of Sanskrit chants and terms related to the science of yoga. This provides a reference for yoga practitioners who wish to perpetuate the vocabulary of yoga in an accurate and respectful way. Seeing terms grouped together in logical arrangements allows one to visualize their relationship to each other.

We hope your journey on the path of yoga will expand and brighten as you experience the audio and visual energy of this beautiful language.

### SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION NOTES

*Vowel combining:* In Sanskrit, when two vowels meet they will combine into something else. For example, “paścima uttānāsana” becomes “paścimottānāsana” and “marīci āsana” becomes “marīcyāsana.”

*Consonant combining:* In Sanskrit, if the final consonant of one word is not sound-compatible with the initial consonant of the next word, the final consonant may change. For example, “ṣaṭ mukhī” becomes “ṣanmukhī,” “tiryac mukha” becomes “tiryāṇmukha,” and “catur pāda” becomes “catuṣpāda.”

Some Sanskrit sounds are pronounced slightly differently in North and South India. The “v” might sound like a “w” and the “ś” or “ṣ” may sound like a “sh” or a “s.”

There are some differences between Sanskrit and Hindi pronunciation. In Sanskrit, when a word ends with an “a,” the “a” is pronounced. In Hindi it is often dropped, even though it is written the same way. For example, the Sanskrit “āsana” sounds like “āsan” in Hindi.

SANSKRIT	HINDI
“a” at the end of a word is pronounced	“a” at the end of a word is often not pronounced
“ā” at the end of a word is long	“ā” at the end of a word is pronounced a short “a”
“ph” pronounced as an aspirated “p”	“ph” pronounced like “f”

### EXPLANATORY NOTES

The images at the beginning of each section are the geometrical representations (*yantra*) of each elemental *cakra*. Each yantra conveys the energy that matches the associated cakra. The Sanskrit sound in the center of each yantra is that cakra’s primary sound, a single syllable ending in “m.”

SECTION	CAKRA LOCATION	ELEMENT	PRIMARY SANSKRIT SOUND
Chants for Your Practice	throat	space	ham̄
Yoga Terms	heart	air	yam̄
Āṣṭāṅga Sequences	navel	fire	ram̄
Āsana Names	reproductive area	water	vam̄
Indices	base of the spine	earth	lam̄

If you cannot find the Sanskrit āsana name in the A–Y section, look in the Āsana Name Synonyms index (page 118). Use the English Name Index on page 120 to locate the posture by English name.

The line drawings are intended as a general representation of each posture. Some variations are not shown. Many postures have several different names, and one name may be used for many postures. The names included here are drawn from the classical systems of yoga and the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar and T.K.V. Desikachar. The first three series of K. Pattabhi Jois' Āṣṭāṅga system are given separately.

Many Sanskrit terms are very complex and difficult to translate into English. Because of this, the suggested meanings are not meant to be definitive. I chose to provide the literal definition for most āsana names. For yoga terms whose common meaning is different than the literal, the literal meaning is shown in quotation marks.

## ĀṢṬĀṄGA SEQUENCES

In Sanskrit the consonants are used to count variations of a posture. So ka=a, kha=b, ga=c, gha=d.

Several postures are not specifically named in the series but are done as transitory postures. These are indicated with an asterisk\*.

Many teachers have modified the first series in different ways, usually adding or deleting postures. The first series presented here is based on K. Pattabhi Jois' own writing in Sanskrit. The second and third series are consistent and drawn from the knowledge of senior practitioners.

The first and last postures (Samasthiti and Utpluti) are pronounced with an “h” on the end by most practitioners. Even though this is inconsistent with the remaining āsana names (which are not pronounced with their ending “m”), out of respect for convention it remains that way here.

Many names in the third series are different than in the A–Y section. For example, “paścimottānāsana” in the A–Y section is spelled “paścimatānāsana” in the Aṣṭāṅga section.



# CHANTS FOR YOUR PRACTICE

*Seven common chants*

*recited as part  
of a yoga class*

*Seven yoga sūtras*

*relating to the  
definition of  
yoga and āsana*



Sanskrit is a very rhythmic and musical language that lends itself well to singing and chanting. Each syllable is either short (one beat) or long (two beats). Recording the ancient wisdom in standard meters enabled easy memorization via chanting, and therefore provided a useful means of preserving Vedic wisdom over time. The first chant, to Gaṇeśa, is from the Rg Veda, the oldest Sanskrit text, written over 3500 years ago. You can tell that it is a Vedic chant by the tonal marks above and below the letters. A horizontal line below a syllable indicates a low tone, no mark means a middle tone, and a vertical line above denotes a high tone. If there are two vertical lines above, you use a middle tone for the first beat, then a high tone for the second beat. Follow the written text as you listen to the CD and you will hear the three tones clearly.

The vast majority of Sanskrit verses are written in meter, usually four lines long with each line being a set number of syllables. The most common meters have either eight or eleven syllables in each line. All chants included here except the first two are in eight or eleven syllable meter.

The sound *Om* is thought to be the original sound from which the entire manifest universe began. *Om* itself is believed to contain all other sounds and therefore all forms of energy. It is very common to begin and end a chant with *Om*.

Chanting to a deity invokes that deity's energy, and is an auspicious way to begin a practice or endeavor. Traditionally, throughout India, Gaṇeśa is worshipped first, being the remover of obstacles and bestower of goodness and abundance. After a chant to Gaṇeśa, one performs a chant appropriate to a particular activity, whether it be a practice, meditation, new undertaking, etc. All chants should be recited with a respectful and devotional attitude.

---

## Gaṇānāṁ Tvā (Rgveda 2.23.1)

A mantra to Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed deity who removes obstacles and grants protection.



### DISC 1, TRACK 1

ॐ

गुणानां त्वा गुणपतिं हवामहे  
कृविं कवीनामुपमश्रवस्तमम् ।  
ज्येष्ठराजं ब्रह्मणां ब्रह्मणस्पत्  
आ नः शृण्वन्नूतिभिस्सीदु सादनम् ॥  
श्रीमहागणपतये नमः

Om

gaṇānāṁ tvā gaṇapatiṁ havāmahe,  
kṛavīṁ kavīnām upamaśravastamam,  
jyeṣṭha-rājāṁ brahmaṇām brahmaṇaspata  
ā nāḥ śrīvannūtibhīssida sādānam.  
śrī-mahā-gaṇapataye namāḥ

Among all of Śiva's attendants, we invoke you Gaṇeśa,  
the seer of seers, the most glorious and eminent,  
sovereign of all brahmans. Oh Lord of Brahman,  
having heard us, sit nearby with all (your) protective energies.  
Salutations to the great and magnificent Gaṇeśa!

---

## Chant to Sarasvatī

To invoke the energy of speech and learning.



### DISC 1, TRACK 2

या कुन्देन्दुतुषारहारधवला  
या शुभ्रवस्त्रावृता ।  
या वीणावरदण्डमण्डितकरा  
या श्वेतपद्मासना ॥  
या ब्रह्माच्युतशङ्करप्रभृतिभिर्  
देवैः सदा वन्दिता ।  
सा मां पातु सरस्वती भगवती  
निश्शेषजाड्यापहा ॥

yā kundendu-tuṣārahāra-dhavalā  
yā śubhra-vastrāvṛtā,  
yā vīṇāvara-daṇḍa-maṇḍita-karā  
yā śveta-padmāsanā.  
yā brahmācyutaśaṅkara-prabhṛtibhir  
devaiḥ sadā vanditā,  
sā mām pātu Sarasvatī bhagavatī  
niśśeṣajāḍyāpahā.

Who is pure white like a garland of jasmine, the moon or snow,  
covered with white clothing;  
whose hands are decorated with a vīṇā, boon, and staff,  
seated on a white lotus;  
ever worshipped by the gods led by Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva;  
may she, divine Sarasvatī, who removes all darkness, protect me.

---

## Yogena Cittasya

To Patañjali, author of the *Yoga Sūtras*. Often chanted at the beginning of a yoga practice or sūtra class.



### DISC 1, TRACK 3

योगेन चित्तस्य पदेन वाचां  
मलं शरीरस्य च वैद्यकेन ।  
योऽपाकरोत्तं प्रवरं मुनीनां  
पतञ्जलिं प्राञ्जलिरानतोऽस्मि ॥

आवाहुपुरुषाकारं  
शङ्खचक्रासिधारिणम् ।  
सहस्रशिरसं श्वेतं  
प्रणामामि पतञ्जलिम् ॥

श्रीमते अनन्ताय नागराजाय नमो नमः

yogena cittasya padena vācām  
malam śarīrasya ca vaidyakena,  
yo ‘pākarottam pravaram muninām  
Patañjalim prāñjalirānato ‘smi.

ābāhu puruṣākāram  
śaṅkha-cakrāsi-dhāriṇam,  
sahasra-śirasam śvetam  
praṇamāmi Patañjalim.

Śrīmate anantāya nāgarājāya namo  
namah

I am a deep bow with hands folded to Patañjali,  
the most excellent of sages, who removed  
impurity of consciousness through yoga,  
impurity of speech through word (grammar), and  
impurity of the body through medicine (Āyurveda).

In the form of a man up to the shoulders,  
holding the conch (divine sound), discus (wheel of time),  
and sword (discrimination),  
thousand-headed, white,  
I bow respectfully to Patañjali.

To the magnificent endless one, the king of the nāgas,  
salutations, salutations.